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INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN INDIAN ART

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Limitations of space have made it impossible to cover all phases of any one craft in this Introduction, or to go into questions of technique. A series of pamphlets has been prepared specially for the Exposition by the leading authorities in the various fields, in which will be found complete, popular treatments of the different arts.

The grouping and installation of this Exhibition is the work of
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PLATE I

INTRODUCTION
TO
AMERICAN INDIAN
ART

TO ACCOMPANY THE FIRST EXHIBITION OF
AMERICAN INDIAN ART SELECTED ENTIRELY
WITH CONSIDERATION OF ESTHETIC VALUE



THE EXPOSITION OF INDIAN TRIBAL ARTS, INC.

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THE Board *of Directors of the EXPOSITION of INDIAN TRIBAL ARTS, INC.*, wishes to express its great appreciation of the generous spirit in which the museums and private collectors of the country have cooperated in forming this exhibition. Without their wholehearted assistance, a true picture of the best in American Indian art could not have been brought together for the benefit and enjoyment of the public. The Board is deeply grateful for their support and appreciative of their willingness to allow rare and valuable pieces to be taken from their collections.

JOHN SLOAN, PRESIDENT.

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PLATE II



INTRODUCTION
TO
AMERICAN INDIAN ART

by

JOHN SLOAN & OLIVER LAFARGE

THE American Indian race possesses an innate talent in the fine and applied arts. The Indian is a born artist; possessing a capacity for discipline and careful work, and a fine sense of line and rhythm, which seems to be inherent in the Mongoloid peoples. He has evolved for himself during many thousand years a form and content peculiarly his own. We white Americans have been painfully slow to realize the Indian's value to us and to the world as an independent artist, although his work has already won recognition abroad.

Our museums have collected Indian manufactures with scientific intent, placing as it were, the choice vase and the homely cooking pot side by side. Bound by the necessity of giving a whole picture they have not been able to set forth their many beautiful specimens in an advantageous manner.

The casual tourist who goes out to the Indian country likes to bring back some knickknack as a souvenir and proudly displays it as a "genuine Indian" article. Unhappily, Americans know the art of the Indian chiefly through such cheap curios made for the gullible white man. Looking upon the Indian himself as a curio, and with this cast of mind failing to recognize the high artistic value of the best Indian products, if indeed he ever sees them, the tourist will not pay the price



PLATE III

PAINTING

which any craftsman must ask for the mere time, labour and materials involved in his work. Thus the whites have forced the Indians, often extremely poor and in need of money, to meet their demand for little, sweet-grass baskets, absurd bows and arrows, teapots, candlesticks, and any number of wretched souvenirs which they never made until white men decided that these, and these only, were "genuine Indian souvenirs."

It is a far cry, indeed, from such miserable knickknacks to the water-colours of young Pueblo Indian artists, reproduced in this book. To any sensitive person, it is obvious that on the basis of these alone, our "curio concept" of the American Indian must be revised. Here are young men steeped in an ancient tradition and discipline who, coming into contact with our pictorial art, have not copied it, but evolved for themselves from their own background new forms—different for each tribal or cultural group—as satisfactorily Indian as the beadwork or the silverwork which Sioux and Navajo evolved from similar contacts, a new force coming directly into our world of art.

In these pictures we see the object combined with the artist's subjective response to it—a union of material and technique both symbolic and intelligible. These young Indians have applied to the painting of their pictures the discipline of line and colour developed through many centuries of decorating every imaginable object of daily or sacred use with designs innately suited to the objects decorated and charged with traditional cultural concepts. Simplicity, balance, rhythm, abstraction, an unequalled range of design elements, and virility, characterize the work of the Indian today.

The Indian artist deserves to be classed as a Modernist, his art is old, yet alive and dynamic; but his modernism is an expression of a continuing vigour seeking new outlets and not, like ours, a search for release from exhaustion. A realist, he does not confine his art to mere photographic impression, nor does he resort to meaningless geometric design. In his decorative realism he combines the elements of esthetic and intellectual appeal. He is a natural symbolist. He is bold and versatile in the use of line and colour. His work has a primitive directness and strength, yet at the same time it possesses sophistication and subtlety. Indian painting is at once classic and modern.

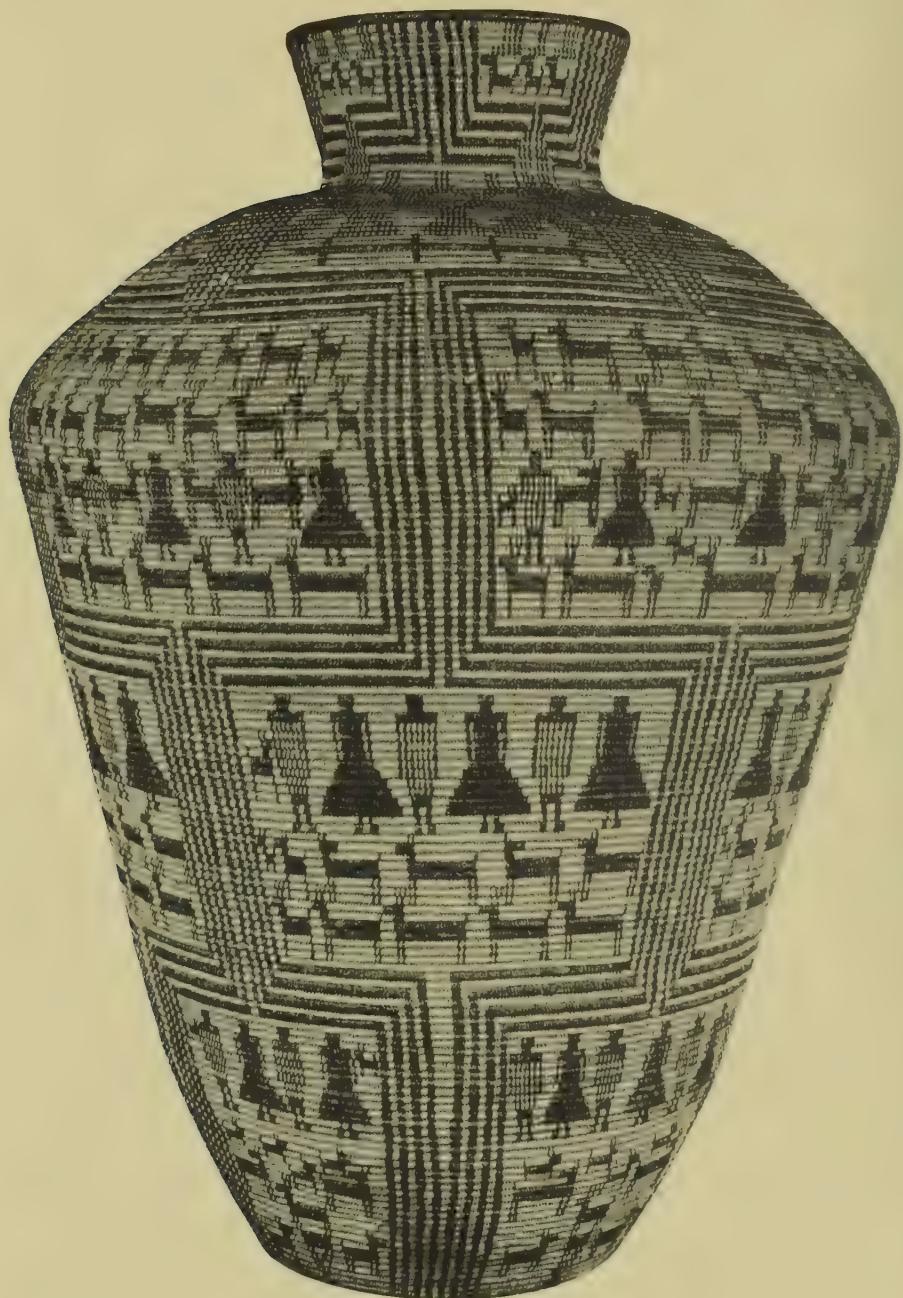


PLATE IV

SUCH mastery does not spring up overnight out of nothing. Behind it is, not centuries, but thousands of years of development. At this present day we have only to turn from the paintings to the decorative arts of the tribes that have kept their crafts intact, to perceive all the elements from which the painters derive, within the limitation of applied design and utilitarian control of form—discipline, rhythm, colour, vigour, suitability, mastery of technique, and constantly recurring development of new methods and new forms.

We do not know what direct painting, realistic or purely decorative, may have been done on skins and wood and other material in ancient times. Probably there was plenty of it, but it has been lost to us. The oldest art traced in its course by the archaeologist, and the most widespread, is basketry. Its bewildering diversity exhausts the possibilities of weave, material and shape, from the huge storage baskets of the Apaches to the tiny California creations with their infinitesimal stitches—hopeless to try to list them here. One thing may be said with emphasis, for the guidance of any white man who wants to buy something really Indian:—be it basket, necklace, robe or bow, if it be not well and truly made, an evidence of fine workmanship, and in good taste, it is not really Indian."

We have illustrated here two examples; one, Apache, is big enough for one of Ali Baba's thieves to hide in and tightly woven enough to hold the oil; the other, Pomo, is a small affair about the size of a sewing basket. The relative coarseness and fineness of the splints are nicely adjusted to the strength required in each case. In both, the shape is suitable, the curves have harmony. The big Apache storage basket is decorated with many small figures, some geometric, some naively approaching realism, arranged apparently at the weaver's pleasure. There is nothing to say to the beholders, "here is a pattern," or "the composition runs this way." Yet one's sense of ease in looking



PLATE V

BASKETRY

at it tells immediately that the maker's pleasure was an artist's sense of arrangement; less obvious than most Japanese prints, pattern is still there. Material, decoration, shape and size all belong together, all are part of a whole, without the least demonstration of effort toward the result achieved.

The Mono carries an obvious design with a frank, centripetal pattern. Stepped arrangements of squares with radiating, small diagonals are so placed on the curved surface as to assume the qualities of incomplete spirals. The shape of the basket has been used to achieve the design, and at the same time the decoration emphasizes the shape, much as in a pen and ink drawing of a round object, shading and highlights make its form apparent.

Restrictions of space limit us to these illustrations, but the same qualities will be found in any good examples of this ancient art, from the Basketmaker work of four thousand years ago, to the best of present day Hopi and Jicarilla weaves with their joyous colours. These colours, of course, are derived from the white man, and therefore the bright baskets are deprecated by ethnologists. The Indian, fortunately is not an ethnological specimen, any more than he is a curio, but a live man with his own initiative. His arts must grow, he cannot be kept from adapting to his own uses such of our materials as suit him. Thus in the beaded Paiute baskets shown in this exhibition, one of our ablest basket weaving tribes has developed a new form of an old decorative technique; since early times the California Indians have applied shell beads in amounts limited by the difficulty of making them; now, commercial beads being obtainable in quantity, they are covering whole baskets of appropriate shapes, with designs suitable to the technique. Under the influence of white buyers, it is true, they are sometimes led to adorn these with the fancy pseudo-symbols of the curio, but in these restrained and dignified specimens exhibited one can see only a desirable and handsome new development of the oldest craft.



PLATE VI



PLATE VII



PLATE VIII

BASKETRY may be called the mother of weaving. That craft, though never as widespread, seems to be nearly as old. The ancient Basketmaker textiles already present many design elements familiar to us now in Navajo blankets, ceremonial altar paintings, and the pictures of the modern Pueblo school. Before the white man came, fabrics were made of cotton, yucca fibre, bark fibre, strips of fur, twine bound solidly with vari-coloured feathers, and the hair of wild animals. The greater ease of acquiring trade blankets and bright cloth from white men wiped out the craft in many sections. While today a fair number of tribes make sashes and other small pieces, often of complicated technique, there remain three major exponents of weaving:—In the Northwest, the Chilkat, in the Southwest, the Hopis, and the Navajos who borrowed their art from Hopis and Pueblos and have become the outstanding weavers north of Central Mexico.

The Chilkat blankets represent a survival of an ancient and primitive craft, going directly back to the days when the hair from the hides of wild animals was spun into yarn. The loom is crude, hardly more than a horizontal bar from which the warpstrings hang free, the weft being patiently twined in and out by the weaver's fingers.

The design is conditioned by the peculiar convention of the Northwest Coast. Under this convention an animal, often of ceremonial importance, is usually portrayed in a symbolic manner. Although theoretically full face, the entire animal is shown, actually as two complete profiles joined edge to edge. The head, trunk and limbs are arbitrarily and drastically rearranged to suit the design and the space occupied, and joints are indicated by depicting them as eyes—a narrow oval with pointed ends inside a rectangle with rounded corners. In a central space left vacant is placed another head, seen front view, as a filler. The whole, in a blanket, is executed in strong colours, bluish green, yellow, white and black.

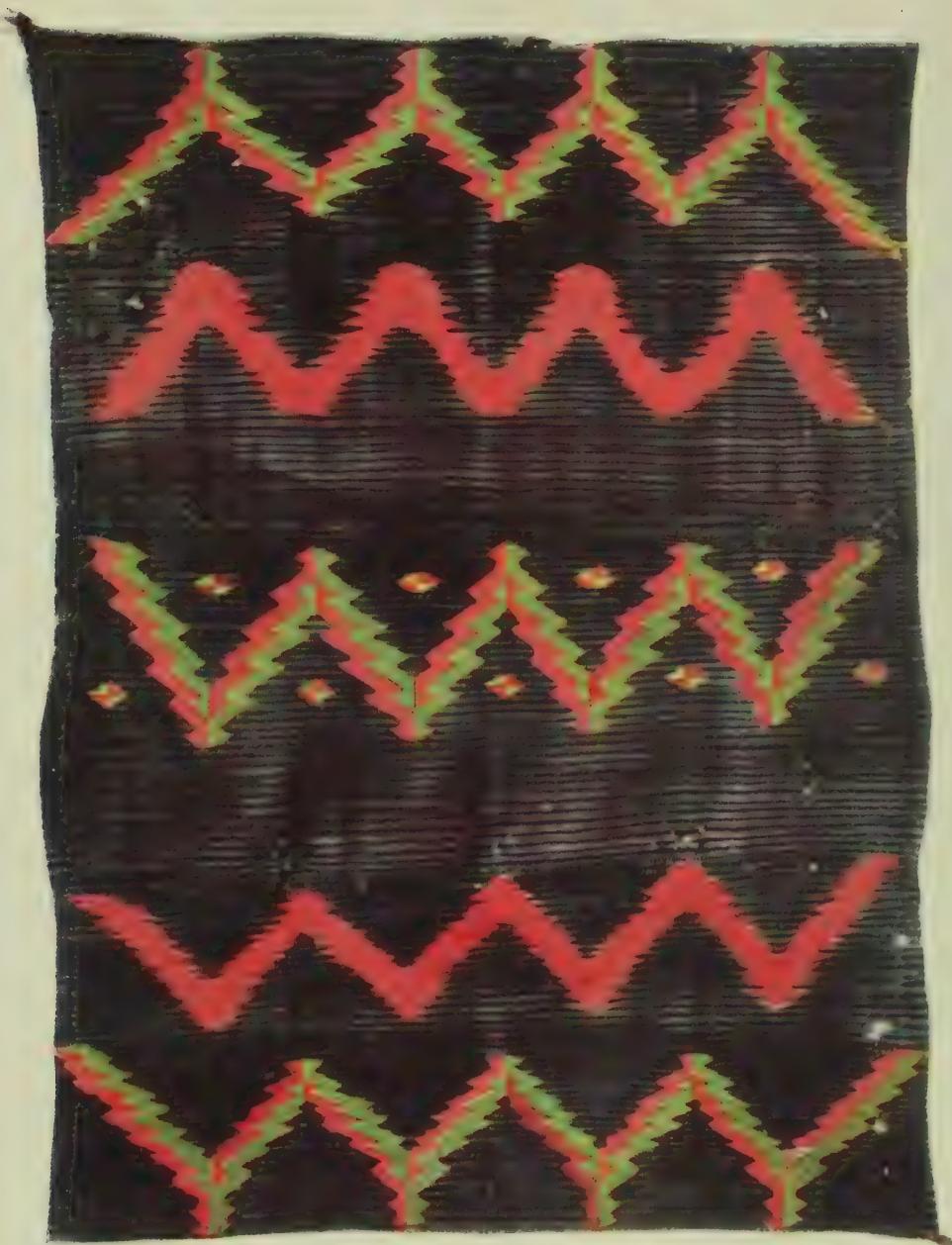


PLATE IX

This description sounds horrible. One look at the blanket in question, however, suffices to show that the actuality is, on the contrary, handsome. One does not perceive a portrayal of an animal, handsome or otherwise. When we see a representation of a highly conventionalized flower applied as a decorative motif in our art, we do not think of it as a tortured and grotesque object, but as a pleasing arrangement of line and colour, which we recognize, secondarily, as being derived from a flower, perhaps identifiable, perhaps not. The same thing is true of the Indian, although for certain ceremonial reasons he may want to have his blanket design associated with a given animal. That association, on the Northwest Coast is attended to by representing some well-known characteristic—such as the beaver's front teeth—which identifies the animal without interfering with the design.

What pleases us, what pleased the maker and the Indian who wore it, is the filling of this space with masses of variegated colour arranged in a logical pattern. Blocks of green, yellow, white and black, with some lines and small design elements such as the superfluous eyes to give emphasis and direction, are built up around a central space. The irregular order in which they are arranged is purposeful and successful. In the central space, placed usually above or below the exact centre, is a conventionalized unit which can be recognized as a face. In an area of relatively meaningless pattern, a face always holds the eye, centering the whole arrangement. Yet the blanket is not stupidly concentric. The lines of decoration rather lead around the central space, to a point of interest at the top—actually, the head of the symbolized creature. The net result is a balanced pattern of colours around a centre only mildly dominant, the whole being pleasing, not too obvious, and handsome.

Navajo blankets are a complete contrast. A versatile people, progressive, yet determined to advance in their own way, they have always borrowed freely. For the art of weaving, use of wool and other materials, various weaves, dyes, patterns, they have drawn upon Hopis, Pueblos, Spaniards, North Americans, even England and Germany. Yet the product which results from this assemblage is not only Indian, but deeply expressive of Navajo character.

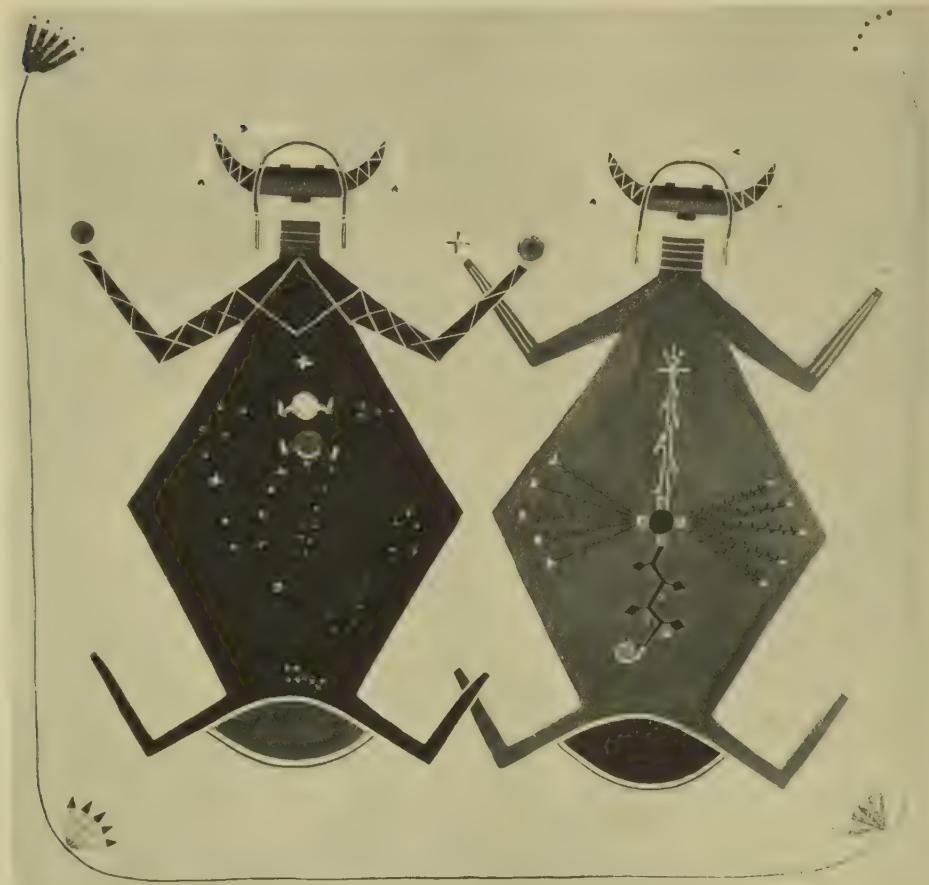


PLATE X

These blankets are not symbolic; despite the wild tales that some traders tell to innocent buyers, they do not "tell a story," they are not "ceremonial." True, some of the design elements are named, "Cloud, Big Star, Flint Knife, Tracks Meeting," and in a sacred dry-painting may represent such objects, but in a blanket they have meaning no more than it means we are thinking of a river in Asia Minor when we decorate something with a Meander pattern, or that we are fond of piercing and sucking eggs when we apply an egg-and-dart motif. Of course, just as a white man, fond of the sea, may choose a Greek wave design for his mantel-piece, so a Navajo woman may select of two suitable patterns, one with a happy symbolic association, but it is none the less true that the use of these designs is purely esthetic, successful or not according to the talent of the artist.

The essence of Navajo design is the arrangement and repetition of a few elements either in stripes or around a centre, or else spotting them against a plain or striped background with that extraordinary sense of spacing which is innate in the American Indian. Although in any one good blanket only a few design elements are to be found, examination of many pieces will show that they have at their command a wide variety from which they select with restraint and taste. Their choice of colours is strong, with contrast used as often as blending, but here again they limit themselves; in the best blankets, one seldom finds more than five colours or tones, including black and white.

In the past half century this art has been continually under one or another kind of deteriorating pressure from curio-minded white men. Bad aniline dyes, factory-spun yarns, sloppy weaving, bad designs, have been urged upon them again and again, resulting in a sharp decline in quality and value. Today, thanks to the growth of a small, intelligent demand, and encouragement from a few traders and outsiders, the art is on the upgrade again. There are still bad influences, notably towards superficially striking, dull, unusable designs coming violently into a centre, emphasized by a strong border—all non-Navajo characteristics—a demand for "curio" blankets full of fancy, wiggly decoration, and a sweat-shop system by which small blankets of standard pattern are turned out with the maximum possible rapidity.



PLATE XI

WEAVING

A really good, modern Navajo blanket, if loosely woven is soft and warm, if tightly woven is smooth, flexible, and tough. The colours may be strong, but are not harsh; bright orange and purple do not occur. Undyed wool, black, grey and white, may be used. The handsomest, and most Navajo, have no border. Save for the sand-painting blankets, a new development of the Indians' own, no blankets portraying arrows, bows, thunderbirds, swastikas, animals or whatnot are really Navajo, no matter who wove them. The hideous lines of dancing figures alleged to be "ceremonial" are nothing but the reflection of white men's ingenuity and bad taste. A good Navajo blanket is dignified, strong, and has beauty that will stand being looked at for years. Plenty of poor weavers produce dull blankets, but from the artist's loom comes a work of art, for which a high price is asked, and which is well worth it.

Do not blame the Navajos, or any other Indians, for letting themselves be debauched into curio-makers. They are very poor, they have to make sales. If a barbarian market insists on gewgaws and "quaint souvenirs," they have to make them. If we will provide a demand for good things, the supply will appear immediately. It is to help create just such intelligent demand that this exposition is organized.

While Navajo women are the weavers, among the neighboring Hopis this work is done by the men, yet if the product of the two tribes be compared, Navajo blankets stand out as masculine, the Hopis showing greater virtuosity in their weaves, a quieter and weaker use of colour and design. Very ancient in type and strikingly beautiful are the Hopi ceremonial garments, embroidered in strong colours on a white cotton background. The most important are the wedding shawls, made by bridegrooms for their wives. The ground-colour is white, but across top and bottom run solid bands of black and green, allowing the background to show through in very fine negative designs. The lower border contains usually five diamond-shaped medallions in bright colours, true symbols of rain, butterflies or other important concepts, above each of which inverted, black triangles—rain clouds—rise into a white field. Here is real symbolism; each colour and each decorative line has significant meaning, but the symbols have been organized into a striking arrangement of unusual harmony.



PLATE XII

VEN the weaving Indians made considerable use of skins for their clothing, and among many tribes weaving was never developed. Notably Plains Indians—the war-bonnet and tipi people—depended on hides, bison, deer, elk, bear, beaver, wolf, muskrat, rabbit and many others. Their bison-hide shields were tough enough to turn the stroke of an army sabre, their finest buckskin was pure white, soft and smooth as a delicate cotton fabric. Tipis, shirts, leggins, moccasins, skirts, cloaks, shields, bags, boxes, drums were made from skins, and all were adorned. Many were, and still are, simply painted. More striking in the old days was their porcupine quill work, the bright quills, dyed in strong colours, arranged in geometric patterns deriving almost always from the shape and use of the thing adorned. A noteworthy characteristic of Plains Indian applied design is its suitability.

The white man brought them ample supplies of beads, of many colours, which they promptly took over and put to characteristically Indian uses, partly replacing porcupine quill, and partly combined with it in new and richer combinations. Many collectors remove good beadwork from the objects to which it is attached, thereby depriving it of the vigour it derives from its well conceived application to that particular object, and reducing it to what it is merely in itself, a strip of handsome ornament. It is best seen and best appreciated *in situ*, whether on a small pouch, or all across the largest robe.

The range of design, with the distinguishing varieties for each tribe, is too great to describe here. Some Indians acquired floral designs from the French, many centuries ago, which, passing from tribe to tribe, have resulted in patterns as unlike the older, geometric type as the Chilkat blanket is unlike the Navajo. The Plains Indians have been quick to take up new elements, while fitting them into their

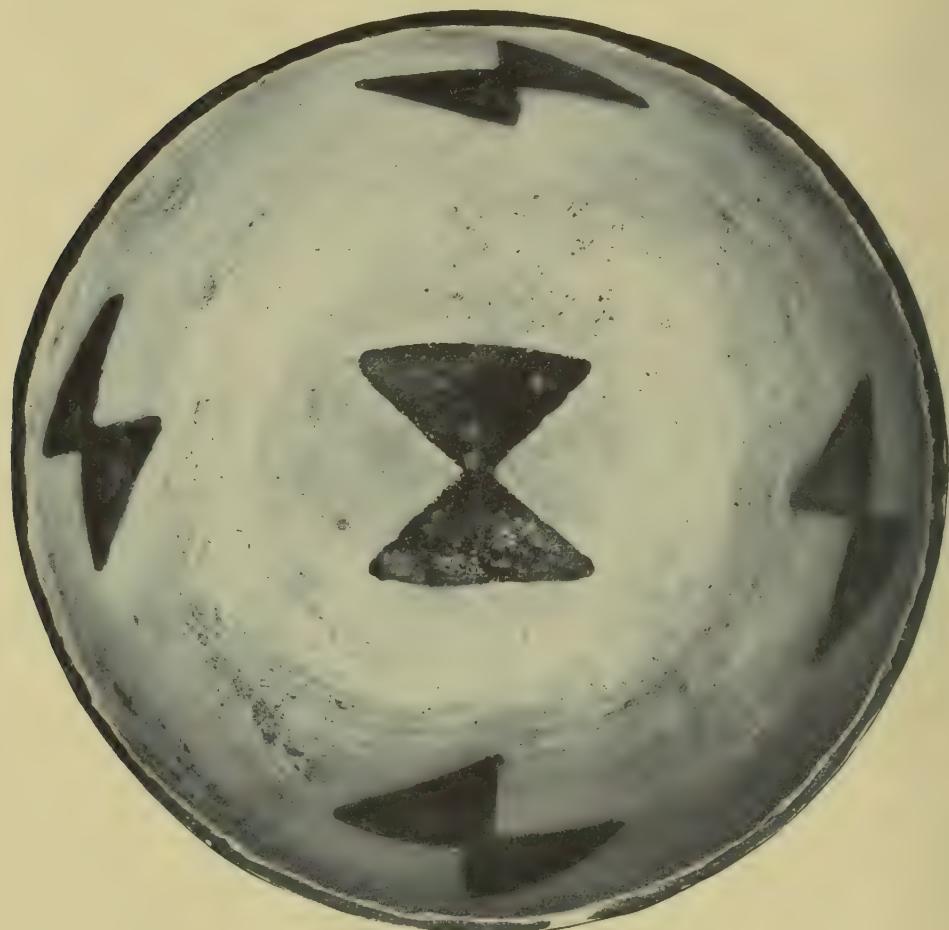


PLATE XIII

BEADWORK

older types, so that it is difficult to draw the line between what is, and what is not, truly Indian. They began depicting horses and American flags long ago. The criterion has to be largely one of taste, and of the Indian feeling. They turn out many silly things, such as ornamented rabbits' feet, or poorly conceived designs slapped onto factory made moccasins, but there are many of them even today who prefer the old, rich masses of decoration, containing still the vigour and brilliance of their ancient warriors.





PLATE XIV

PEOPLE moving about frequently, has little use for easily broken pottery. Ceramics were not developed until Indians, having discovered agriculture, began to stay put. But though the vessels may break, the pieces are almost indestructible; from shortly after the first nubbins of corn were harvested in the Southwest, archaeologists can trace the history of the art, and even date the sequence of occupations by changes in style. Here, where we have a history documented over several thousand years, we can see how continuously the Indian improved, changed, revived old types, hit upon new and radical departures. The genius of individuals was evidently at work, even as in our own day Nampeyo of Hano and Maria of San Ildefonso have revolutionized pottery making in their respective villages, or as the Navajo, Tlah, in fear and trembling wove a sacred picture into a blanket, starting a new development among his people the results of which cannot yet be foretold.

To a weaving and basket-making people, pottery offered a smooth surface on which a curved line could be freely made, a wide choice of shapes, and a form and surface completed before the ornamentation was applied, instead of an unfinished object into which the design had to be worked while it was still making. There ensued, and still continues, a constant experimentation in design, treatment of surface, and methods of manufacture. The modern Pueblo potter has at her disposal one of the richest and most complete stores of design elements in the whole world. There is hardly anything from a Greek wave through a Norman dog-tooth to a Modernist abstraction of a leaf that one cannot find.

The nine pieces shown here do not begin to cover the whole range. Each Pueblo has its own favoured shapes, colours, and designs. As in



PLATE XV

POTTERY



PLATE XVI



PLATE XVII

POTTERY

the jar from Zia, complicated figures are built up partly by combinations of elements, partly by reducing realistic figures into patterns often far removed from their originals, and these arrangements are applied with a nice sense of balance, of the shape of the jar, and of the strong motion which the designs often possess. Realism is not uncommon, animals and plants being slightly conventionalized, or shown with accuracy and charm, combined with designs which may or may not carry an appropriate symbolic meaning.

From the pottery one sees the trail leading directly to the modern Pueblo painters. In pictures and in pottery, one is faced by the problem of symbolism, how much is meant to be interpreted, how much pure esthetic design. The answer probably is that it's all one. Potter and artist draw their spiritual sustenance from their tribal life, and that life is all a design, a dance and a ceremonial, from birth to death, and through all the ramifications of daily life; it is a whole, individuals are part of a pattern. The deer and the rain design and the unit derived from a butterfly, are used on jars and pictures, they are set deep in the life of the artists, they appear in other forms, still patterned and controlled, in the dances. Of course they are conscious of their symbols, but their whole life is charged with symbols, from them, inevitably they draw their esthetic patterns; the significance is quite different from what it would be for us, or for Navajos, who use true symbols only with specific intent.

Between the oldest and most modern piece illustrated, lie thousands of years. The newest is a dish by Tonita of San Ildefonso, painted in two contrasting qualities of black by a process invented by María of the same village. The design is built around a triangle, from which radiate curved figures, one might almost call them curved frets, returning on themselves with partial repetitions of the central unit. The conception is striking, the execution vigorous. The other is a simple, white bowl from an old cliffdwelling. Upon it the potter painted five hour-glass shaped, black figures which are yet obviously butterflies, placed with great knowledge in just the right positions within the white hemisphere.



PLATE XVIII

THE idea of adorning oneself comes just as naturally and as early as the idea of adorning one's utensils, perhaps earlier. Certainly the archæologist's spade has yet to unearth man on this continent so primitive that he did not make at least a few beads and a bone wristlet. Free of our set standards of value in jewels, or our false convention which makes sheer value outweigh beauty, the Indian seized upon whatever material would give a handsome result—shell of all kinds, polished bone, turquoise, freshwater pearls, anthracite coal, seeds, malachite, teeth, claws, stained wood, quartz, crystal, whatever came to hand regardless of how hard it might be to work. With his amazing capacity for slow, painstaking effort, he shaped the most refractory or fragile materials to a fine perfection.

The Northeastern Indians took white and purple fragments of shell, grinding and boring them into long, cylindrical beads. When one thinks how many must have been broken, it becomes painful to imagine the labour of making a wampum belt. In the Southwest, similar bits of shell were, and still are, ground into flat disks—relatively easier to make—and strung together. A good necklace of this mis-called "wampum," white or bluish-brown, presents a perfectly even surface, the effect is of a snake-like string, an eighth to a quarter of an inch in diameter, broken at intervals by larger bits of turquoise.

In early times, Indian jewelers were already making fine mosaics of precious substances—turquoise, mother-of-pearl, red stone. They carved elaborate earrings and pendants from shell, worked turquoise matrix into "fetish" figures, and multiplied their types of necklace endlessly.

With the white man came that startling innovation, metal, both as tool and material. For a long time the material had little effect on Indian arts, then in the Southwest sprang up a remarkable silverworking industry, dominated by the Navajos, with the Zuñi close behind them. Derived from the Spaniards, and still in some ways reminiscent of them—the big, old type conchas are Spanish in origin, the silver



PLATE XIX

JEWELRY



PLATE XX

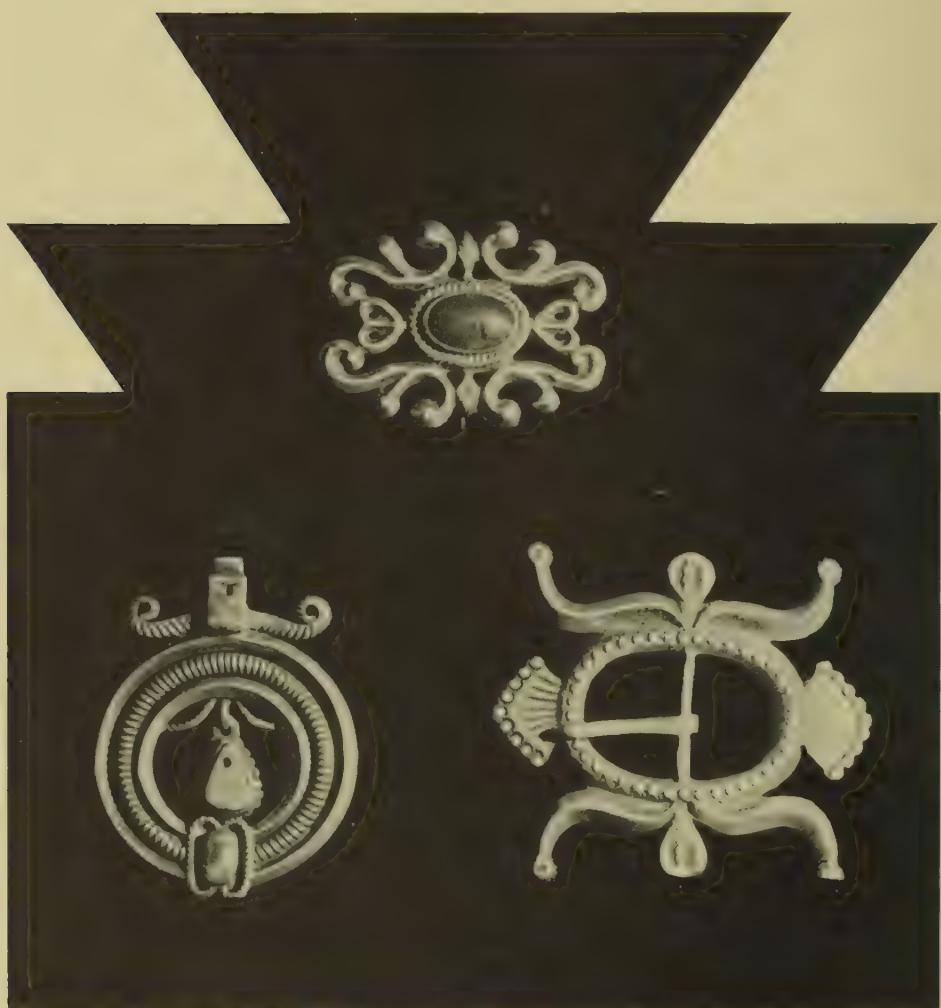


PLATE XXI

JEWELRY

bridles trace back to Arabia—they have made it peculiarly their own, and with it revolutionized Indian jewelry throughout the Southwest.

Turquoise, shell, and mosaics continue, still well made by Indians of various Pueblos, but when one thinks of Indian jewelry in that area, he visualizes rich, soft silver and turquoise in a hundred combinations. The Zuñis are freest in combining the two elements, with them a silver bracelet is hardly more than a setting for fine, deep blue stones. The Navajo is the master of silver as such, with some slight attention to brass and copper, particularly in answer to the Apaches' demand for those metals.

To a Navajo, the big rectangle or rectangular design of silver which adorns the back of a bow-guard (the piece of leather which protects one's right wrist from the slap of the bowstring) demands a central turquoise, otherwise, he uses stones or not as he sees fit. The best belts, big, smooth oval or circular plaques, have none.

The keynote of Navajo jewelry is mass, simplicity, smooth surfaces of pure, soft silver, set off by the repetition of quiet and rather inert designs. This is shown particularly well in the fine, old necklace depicted here. The large, plain beads are in themselves a repetition of highlight and shadow and successive masses of smooth silver, set off by recurring, conventionalized squash blossoms, all leading down in an easy flow to the simple pendant, which reverses the natural curve of the necklace. On one of the bracelets exhibited, a raised boss in the centre appears to dwindle, on each side, into a line of small bosses set into small incised areas. At the upper and lower edges are low rims, also incised with simple diagonals. All the decoration moves with the curve of the bracelet, and derives its quality from the richness of the plain surfaces of silver. The other bracelet, in contrast, is entirely an arrangement of flowing lines, concentrated upon a central stone.

The Navajo jeweller can abandon simplicity when he chooses, without sacrifice of strength or becoming ornate. One illustration shows a particularly fine, circular pendant, related to the one on the necklace, but much more complicated and with the circle closed. This must have been made for an unusual necklace, or, more likely, the forehead piece of a special bridle. Within the smooth outer band is enclosed a strip so wrought as to give the effect of a very finely twisted rope, an



PLATE XXII

JEWELRY

achievement of no mean skill. Repeating the outer curve, it presents a surface of narrow, diagonal, curved highlights and shadows made deeper by the oxidizing of the depressions—an effect consciously sought by the maker. Thus far we have an elaborated, handsome circle. It is brought to a stop, so to speak, pointed and centred by the nice placement of turquoise (evidently old eardrops were used), on and within the circle. It is still simple, but masterful.

Certain objects, such as belt buckles, lead naturally to striking shapes, but they are not ornate or in bad taste. Even a certain type of highly ornamented belt saves itself by its pleasing repetition. With few exceptions, none of the designs stamped or cut in the silver have any symbolic meaning whatsoever.

In recent years this silverwork has had to meet a more devastating attack than any other craft in the Southwest. First there has been the pressure to put swastikas, thunderbirds, and a hundred other gim-crack designs, on the silver. Then, there is a constant campaign by commercial whites to introduce low-grade, thin silver, and all the mechanical appliances of miniature factories; a drive, really, to bring this inherently expensive craft down to the souvenir price level, and which can succeed only by utterly debasing the product. More than this, factories are flooding the market with entirely fraudulent, low-grade silver, hideous beyond belief, cheap and satisfactory to the curio mind, while several ingenious souls have hired real Indians—the public is invited to come in and see the real Indians at work—to manufacture jewelry wholesale by straight factory methods, save that designs are stamped on by a man with a hammer.

An Indian bracelet, that is a bracelet which, being made by an Indian, possesses any special quality which a machine could not give it, is conceived and made by one man, without the aid of machinery. From the lump of silver to the finished product and placing of the stones, it is all his. No one looking for a beautiful object would hesitate for an instant between a piece so made, and one turned out by mass-production methods, but as yet not enough Americans are looking for beautiful and valuable objects to keep good jewelers from being forced into the factories.



PLATE XXIII

SCULPTURE

WORKING in, and constantly adorning, ductile clay, soft wood and stone of manageable texture, one would expect the Indian to have evolved a considerable art of modelling and carving, perhaps even statuary. It is surprising how little this phase of art was developed, perhaps because relief would hamper the utility of the objects concerned. Still, in the realm of ceremonial, one can imagine ample scope for the sculptor. In ancient times, save for small figurines belonging more properly in the jewelry class in the Southwest, only the Mound Builders of the Mississippi Valley produced really interesting relief work in any great quantity. This is in sharp contrast to the great Indian cultures from Mexico to Peru; some scientists hold that there was a contact between Mexico and the Mound Builders, perhaps they derived their art from the south.

Being chiefly concerned with the present day, we cannot go into the Mound Builder question, the many nations and strata of culture grouped under that name, the manifold aspects of their plastic arts in clay and stone, in vessels, pipes, figures, spearheads and adornments. As part of the American heritage, some few pieces are included in this exhibition; there is, perhaps, a direct descent from them to the more recent carved stone pipes. The diorite bowl which we illustrate, very simple in form, with the plain lines around the rim leading to a stylized, severe bird's head, shows the Indian in a classical mood. The very finest of prehistoric Pueblo black-on-white pottery, a few rare pieces of their modern work, attain the same quiet beauty.

No other objects in this exhibition are as familiar in conception, from a European point of view, as the delicate figurines, one of which is illustrated in this Introduction. It has its own style, but the idiom is one which we can understand without effort.

Carving and modelling are continued today in various places; spotted on the map, the distribution is erratic. The Iroquois still make their wooden "false face" masks, well executed, competent, and



PLATE XXIV



PLATE XXV



PLATE XXVI

SCULPTURE

rather unpleasant in conception. Some Plains or near-Plains tribes carve pipes of the soft red stone, Catlinite. In the Southwest, Tesuque Pueblo turns out uninteresting "rain gods" for curio trade. At Santa Clara they are beginning to model animals in the polished black ware, with humour and perception, but hovering on the edge of the silly gewgaw business. Almost every Pueblo potter, save the very greatest, models a few knickknacks for profit. The Zuñis continue carving pleasant little fetishes of stone. The Hopis make their Katchina dolls, cottonwood carved and painted in the images of their masked dancers, sometimes merely gay, occasionally handsome and even impressive. In the far North, Eskimos make skillful little figures and decorated objects from bone and ivory.

Within recent times, serious carving, work of importance in wood, copper, horn and stone, has been virtually monopolized by the tribes of the Northwest Coast. Their art presumably goes back to days as ancient as the Mound Builders, but if so, the materials being more perishable, most of their creations have been lost to us. These people make from wood and horn the large and small vessels and containers which other tribes fashion out of clay or hides, and, seamen, they build—and inevitably decorate—wooden boats; from this, perhaps, their gift for carving grew. Like most Indians, they brought their work under ceremonial sanctions, a great part of it is concerned with conventionalized representations of significant animals and ancestral or divine beings, closely related in style to the Chilkat blankets, as for instance, the copper mask shown here. It may well have been in carving and painting the figureheads of their high-prowed, seagoing canoes that they developed the convention of depicting creatures by two profiles joined together; certainly the same method carries the representation of a single animal around all four sides of wooden trenchers and boxes.

Most famous of their works are the totem-poles, huge ceremonial-heraldic emblems portraying men and animals, often in the full round and of heroic size. Frequently the animal intended can be recognized only by the established short-hand marks—two front teeth, a beaver; row of grinding teeth, a bear; sharply down-curved beak, a hawk; curved in another manner, a raven—while the figure has that form which the



PLATE XXVII

SCULPTURE

artist chooses as most suitable to his purpose. But realism is also used, perhaps a single figure of a raven, with twelve-foot wing-spread and overhanging beak, placed just high enough on its base to seem free of earth, dominant; at sight one recognizes, not just a raven, but great Raven of the myths.

These Indians have achieved wide versatility in manner. The big wooden bowl figured here is far removed from the swarming totem-poles. The dominant feature is a curious, sad, human face, carved with simple directness in high relief. After so many objects in which a sense of design and formalization confine even the most pictorial efforts, this face is disturbing. We, too, associate naturalistic human faces on objects with Toby jugs and such paraphernalia; at first glance this bowl fails to charm eyes accustomed to the Indian's clear rhythms. But there is something arresting in the face itself, the more one contemplates it, the finer it seems; the execution is direct, simple, and strong. The whole shape of the vessel, with its two, graceful, wing-like handles is excellent. It becomes clear that the face belongs there; once the fascination of mere portraiture has subsided, it takes its place in the whole. Whether we have a bowl nicely calculated to set off a face, or a face used in a highly original manner to complete a bowl, it is hard to say, but the result is a surprising success.

Among these people, a modern type of sculpture in black slate has arisen, largely in response to a curio demand. Much of it is very poor, but the best pieces suggest a parallel development here to Pueblo Indian paintings, and the intricate arrangement of figures has some of the quality of good Chinese work in ivory. There is no attempt to work in our manner: a new Indian form has been evolved as a result of contact with us.



PLATE XXVIII



PLATE XXIX



PLATE XXX

CONCLUSIONS

ALMOST all the art discussed here is applied to the decoration of useful things; before the white man stepped in, this was always so, if we accept the Indian's view of religious objects as being among the most highly useful. This embodiment of the Indian's conception of use and beauty in the materials of his daily life is art in its widest sense; not up on a shelf to be regarded occasionally, but adorning and giving meaning to everything about him. Just so his religion permeates each least commonplace of his universe, and the search for harmony and success within himself and within the tribe, is voiced in dances by forms, designs, rhythms, symbols, until one is lead from them back to his art again, realizing that they are all beats of one pulse. The modern Indian artist may not be as orthodox as his ancestors, he may even have embraced the Christian faith or be, like most white men, religionless, but he still derives from the traditional forms and takes his strength from his ancestral pattern.

It is only recently that white teachers of Indian children have stopped trying to educate them away from their own art. For decades we tried, and in some cases unfortunately succeeded, in instructing Indians to forget their own culture and to force themselves into ours. Indian artists were given reproductions of masterpieces, Currier and Ives prints, or mere advertisements, and told that these only were art. We tried to mechanize their crafts and induce them to use factory mass production instead of their own individual tools and technique. No factory blanket could compare to one made with infinite patience and care by a Navajo woman from wool her husband sheared, dyed by her with her own dyes, woven on a primitive loom beside her desert hogahn. To the extent that white teachers succeeded in persuading the Indians to abandon their own methods, their art deteriorated.

To most Indians, the income to be earned from their industries is vitally important. For instance, the Pueblo of San Ildefonso was until

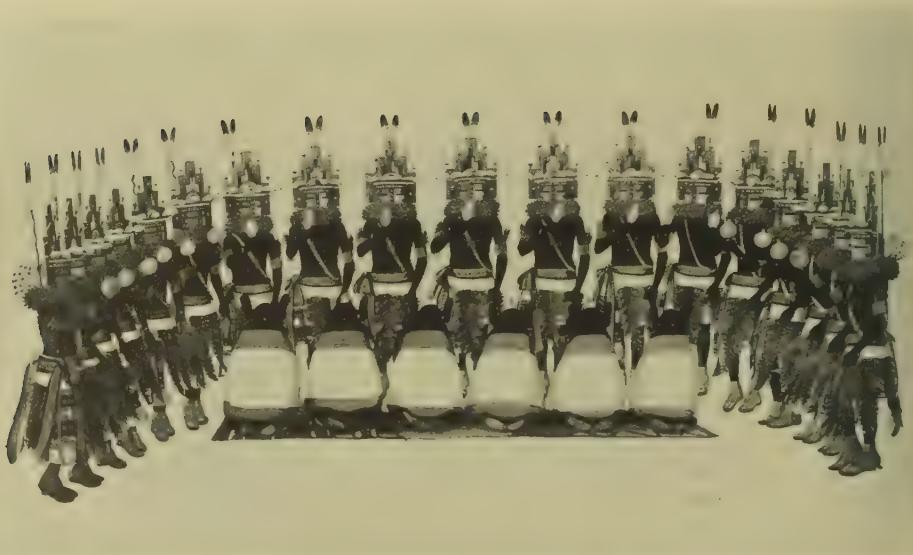


PLATE XXXI

CONCLUSIONS

recently in a bad way, having lost much of its land and water rights. The people were depressed and discouraged, all were poverty-stricken. They revived their almost forgotten pottery-making and their younger artists, encouraged by Dr. Edgar L. Hewett of the Museum of New Mexico, began to develop their watercolours. Having a good market in Santa Fe, they were able to earn the additional money so that today the pueblo is advancing, and increasing in numbers.

The American Indian is willing and competent, given a market, to earn a congenial and lucrative living through his art, with benefit to himself and to the country. Even today in the teeth of ignorance and neglect, he is keeping his talents alive and developing them. The preservation of these and related phases of his cultural life, ceremonies, dances and music, are necessary to his mental and emotional well being, for they afford him means of self-expression; with them to give him integrity, and through them, he can become increasingly self-supporting, self-reliant, self-respecting, and a valuable contributor to our modern scene.

The Indian Bureau of the Federal Government, recognizing these facts, is now encouraging the Indians to continue to create and to develop their own arts. The old, ignorant attitude of condemning anything Indian as "uncivilized," is giving way to sympathetic understanding, and even instruction in the schools by older tribal artists. At the same time, scientists and artists are painfully aware of the danger of losing what remains of the esthetic heritage of the Indians. They realize that if the arts are to survive, they can do so only as any other arts do, through the support of discriminating buyers anxious to possess the creations for their own sakes.

The Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts is expected to give thousands of white Americans their first chance to see really fine Indian work exhibited as art. And it will give the Indian a chance to prove himself to be not a maker of cheap curios and souvenirs, but a serious artist worthy of our appreciation and capable of making a cultural contribution that will enrich our modern life.



PLATE XXXII

INFORMATION

THE PRINCIPAL TRIBES

THERE were more than one hundred and fifty tribes of Indians in what is now United States territory, when the white men came, and archaeology reveals almost as great a number of cultural subdivisions in earlier times. The prehistoric cultures represented in this exhibition, and the main historic culture groups, together with some of the most important tribes, are listed here.

PREHISTORIC

The Mississippi and Ohio Valleys. The Mound Builders, having many subdivisions; the full range of their civilization is not yet known.

The Southwest. Basketmakers, initiators of agriculture and weaving within the United States. They were followed by the Prehistoric Pueblos, including the Cliffdwellers, from whom the modern Pueblos and Hopis spring.

HISTORIC

The Eastern Woodlands. The Iroquois tribes, Chippewa, Pottawotomi, Sauk and Fox, Illinois, Shawnee, Winnebago, Abnaki, Micmac, Pequot, Delaware, Powhatan.

The Southeast. Tuscarora (later united with the northern Iroquois), Cherokee, Yuchi, Creek, Seminole, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Natchez, Biloxi, Atakapa, Chitimacha, Caddo, Quapaw.

The Great Plains. Blackfoot, Piegan, Gros-Ventre, Assiniboine, Crow, Hidatsa, Mandan, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Dakota Sioux, Omaha, Iowa, Kansa, Osage, Kiowa, Comanche, Ute.

The Central Plateau. Shushwap, Thompson, Kutenai, Flathead, Nez Percé, Salish, Shoshoni, Paiute.

The Southwest. Rio Grande Pueblos, Laguna, Acoma, Zuñi, Hopi, Havasupai, Walapai, Mohave, Yuma, Pima, Maricopa, Papago, the Apache tribes, Navajo.

The Northwest Coast, extending up into Alaska. Tlingit, Chilkat, Haida, Tsimshian, Chilkotin, Kwakiutl, Coast Salish, Nootka, Chinook, Kalapooian, Wailatpuan, Klamath.

California. Yurok, Wiyit, Wintun, Maidu, Pomo, Wappo, Miwok, Yokuts, Mono, Washo.

On the Northern Coast of Alaska are found the Western Eskimos, and in the interior, many Northern Athapaskan Tribes, forming an extension of the Mackenzie Basin culture.

THE Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts, Inc., was organized in 1930 for the purpose of stimulating and supporting American Indian artists by creating a wider interest and more intelligent appreciation of their work in the American public at large, and to demonstrate to the country what important contribution to our culture the Indian is making. To this end, an exhibition of Indian products in the fine and applied arts, selected from the best material available, both old and new, has been arranged. The exhibition opens in New York, November 30th, 1931. Sponsored and circulated by the College Art Association, it will go to the principal cities of the United States, on tour of about two years' duration.

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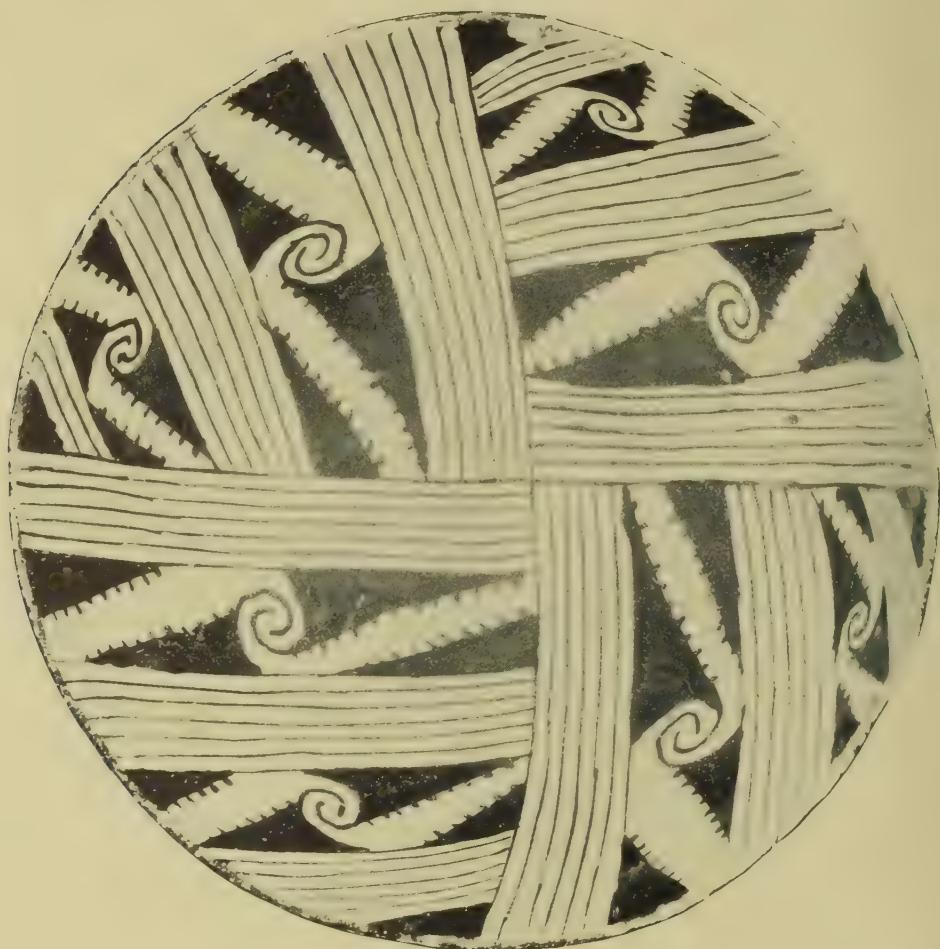


PLATE XXXIII

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